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THE ROLE OF CEREMONIALS IN ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

HARRISON M. TRICE, JAMES BELASCO, and JOSEPH A. ALUTTO

THE analysis of organizational phenomena may be predicated upon numerous theoretical or empirical bases. For example, it is possible to adopt a strictly structural Weberian analysis of authority and power, a Parsonian functional analysis of interdependencies between organizational sub-units, or a "human relations" approach to the investigation of individual sentiments and internal or external group interactions.¹ Each of these perspectives, however, incorporates the implicit assumption that directly discernible links exist between the observable substance of organizational activities and the eventual achievement of specific system goals.

The significance of ceremonials has received little attention in studies of work organizations. The role of the personnel administrator, for example, is customarily evaluated in terms of his effectiveness in performing specific activities which further the production goals of the organization, such as employee selection or dealing with grievances. Personnel activities such as selection procedures or training programs also have important symbolic aspects, according to this article, which are important in legitimizing decisions and actions taken within the organization. The personnel administrator plays an important ceremonial role in several respects, legitimizing various personnel decisions with the authority of the entire organization, supplying "scientific" endorsement of wage decisions, acting as "father confessor" to employees, etc.

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Although some researchers continue to assume that formal industrial systems have unidimensional goals centering around publicly stated organizational missions, it has been recognized increasingly that organizations allocate considerable human and physical resources to the simultaneous achievement of multiple goals, many of which appear to possess relevance for the fulfillment of objectives other than production or profit. Activities directed toward nonproduction goals have been identified as serving either system maintenance or adaptation functions and have been discussed most often under the rubric of goal displacement. Merton,² Selsnick,³ Messinger,⁴ and Gusfield,⁵ for instance,

¹For discussion and examples of such approaches see A. Etzioni, ed., *Complex Organizations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966); J. March, ed., *Handbook of Organizations* (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1965); Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1957); and N. Smelser, *Social Change In The Industrial Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

²Merton, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-202.

³Philip Selsnick, *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, 1957).

⁴Sheldon L. Messinger, "Organizational Transformation: A Case Study of a Declining Social Movement," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (February 1955), pp. 3-10.

⁵Joseph R. Gusfield, "Social Structure and Moral Reform: A Study of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (November 1955), pp. 221-232.

have identified and analyzed situations in which the initial profit-production system goals were replaced by objectives related to simply the continuance of current procedures and structures.

Despite the recognition and acceptance of goal-displacement phenomena and the prevalence of organizational activities devoted to systems maintenance, most perspectives for the analysis of organizations include (either implicitly or explicitly) a postulate concerning the existence of overt, easily directed relationships between the allocation of system resources and the attainment of system goals. For example, although the role performances of "personnel administrators" have been categorized as organizational activities primarily directed toward the fulfillment of system maintenance requirements,⁶ the assumption continues that there are connections between the actual substance of personnel administrator role behaviors and the attainment of system maintenance goals. Consequently, when investigating the achievement of maintenance functions, researchers often observe the actions of personnel administrators (for example, as they search out and listen to employee complaints) and attempt to determine the relative effectiveness of their behavior. This approach is predicated on the supposition that the more effectively such activities are carried out, the greater will be the probability of achieving desired organizational maintenance goals. Omitted from consideration is the question of whether or not the mere exhibition of these activities (seeking and recognizing employee complaints) has as great an organizational significance as an empirical estimate of performance effi-

ciency and effectiveness. Stated somewhat differently, it might be profitable to determine the degree to which the simple occurrence or existence of personnel role behaviors (rather than the relative capabilities of any particular personnel administrator) contributes to the achievement of system maintenance.

This article suggests that determination of the actual substantive (i. e., manifest) efficiency or effectiveness with which personnel activities are conducted may have less relevance for an understanding of how institutional maintenance is achieved than would an analysis of the latent or symbolic value of such activities. Furthermore, it is contended that the investigation of organizational ceremonials is of particular utility for understanding how personnel administrators contribute to the achievement of general system goals. In essence, the purpose of this study is to systematically explore ceremonial aspects of personnel roles, with particular emphasis on the organizational significance of such activities.

Ceremonials in Organizations

The discussion of ceremonials is usually associated with anthropological descriptions of primitive peoples. In reality, of course, ceremonials constitute an essential element of all social systems, partially because they serve to stabilize and perpetuate the structure and functioning of system subunits.⁷ For present purposes, ceremonials are considered to be distinct sets of system practices, pro-

⁶For example see R. Linton, "A Neglected Aspect of Social Organizations," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 45, No. 6 (May 1940), pp. 870-886; R. Linton, "Age and Sex Categories," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 7, No. 5 (October 1942), pp. 589-603; and F. Young, "The Function of Male Initiation Ceremonies: A Cross Cultural Text of An Alternative Hypothesis," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (January 1962), pp. 370-396.

⁷D. Katz and R. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966).

cedures, and techniques—which are accepted and desired by system members, which are associated with both “assumed” and “actual” contributions to organizational existence and which may or may not be known to system members. The survival of a ceremonial is not dependent on logically or empirically derived measures of effectiveness, value, or utility; its existence often is based on random learning or superstition.⁸ Consequently, it is possible for organizational members to neither agree on nor know with any certainty the value or purpose of a ceremonial, while they continue to participate in and support such activities.

Generally (within organizational systems) ceremonials serve to structure, validate, and stabilize collective action, in part due to their being “passed along” to newcomers during periods of socialization. In this manner ceremonials provide perceptual and cognitive structuring for individuals confronted with new or ambiguous organizational stimuli. In so doing, ceremonials invest associated organizational behaviors with reality and legitimacy which enable the system and its members to undertake actions required for continued existence or growth.

Organizations tend to use ceremonials in at least three ways. First, they are employed during the socialization processes to which all members are exposed in order to modify the initial perceptions of the newcomers. Socialization practices are designed to produce a set of values, norms, attitudes, and expectations in individuals which will be supportive of overall system operations. During such processes, emphasis is also placed

⁸However, see the discussion of “survivals” in A. Gouldner, “The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (April 1960), pp. 161–178.

on extinguishing potentially disruptive or dysfunctional behavioral tendencies.⁹ As discussed below, selection and training phenomena encompass ceremonials of significant relevance for the socialization of system members.

Second, by generating consistency between the expectations of related role performers within a system, ceremonials perform valuable stabilizing functions. Such ceremonial activities act to support and sustain the authority of individual decision makers and, in a wholistic sense, the organization as an operational unit. Ceremonials serve this valuable function especially during periods of role transition; they stabilize aspects of organizational structure and operation prior to, during, and following role change. In this respect ceremonials are employed to ease and quicken the transformation of organizational identities for system members.

Additionally, in an objective sense ceremonials facilitate the reduction of anxieties and ambiguities often experienced by members. This is particularly true when the problem or crisis requires the employment of nonsalient or nonexistent knowledge. System ceremonials may serve, at least in the short run, as acceptable substitutes for “real solutions” through generating affective feelings of familiarity, tension reduction, and certainty (whether real or imagined).

It should be borne in mind that ceremonials serve to structure the perceptions and expectations of both the participating role performers and others in the organization. Frequently, the ability

⁹For example, see E. Gross, “Some Functional Consequences of Primary Controls In Formal Work Organizations,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (August 1953), pp. 368–373; and J. Alutto, “Identification: State and Process Considerations,” *Cornell Journal of Social Relations*, Vol. 2, Spring 1967, pp. 45–60.

to distinguish between the mythical and actual outcomes of ceremonials is retained only by individuals who may be characterized as interested nonsystem members or observers.¹⁰ The perspectives of such individuals are not restricted by the system-wide acceptance of assumed relationships between specific activities and the fulfillment of particular organizational goals. Therefore, in order to determine the actual contributions of ceremonial activities to organizational structure and functioning, one should consider adopting at least three perspectives—that of the individual directly participating in ceremonial activities, that of related role performers within the organizational milieu, and that of outside observers.

Relevance of Ceremonials for Personnel Administrators

One method of demonstrating the use of ceremonials in formal work organizations is to focus on the ceremonial aspects of one organizational position, the traditional system justification for such activities expressed in terms of associated goal achievements, and the actual impacts of such exhibited behaviors regardless of system assumptions. The particular focus of this article is on the role of the personnel administrator. The selection of this position was determined, in part, by literature suggesting that personnel activities contribute primarily to the achievement of maintenance goals rather than profit-production goals. This is relevant, since given the previously stated definition of a "ceremonial," we believe analysis of organizational ceremonials may be most appropriate to an understanding of activities contributing

¹⁰These individuals may be said to be non-socialized, concerned, and relatively independent of system rewards.

to the attainment of maintenance goals.

Unfortunately, of the many role behaviors exhibited by personnel administrators, those of basically a ceremonial nature probably are least understood by organizational analysts. A review of relevant literature reveals the identification and discussion of almost every conceivable personnel activity and related system consequence with little reference to their possible mythical or symbolic natures.¹¹ Conversely, it is curious that ceremonial aspects of personnel roles were among the first issues mentioned and described during our recent interviews with practicing personnel administrators. Furthermore, these role performers consistently indicated that ceremonial activities constitute an extensive and essential subset of their behaviors.¹²

As will become apparent, the observations reported here are basically impressionistic and qualitative in character. They have, however, been generated by in-depth interviews and observational data collected from over three hundred subjects. The subject pool consisted of one hundred ten personnel administrators from all levels and approximately

¹¹See, for instance, Dale Hemming and Wendell French, "The Mythical Personnel Manager," *California Management Review*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Summer 1961), pp. 24-38; Dalton E. McFarland, "The Scope of the Industrial Relations Function," *Personnel*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (January-February 1959), pp. 42-51; and Charles Myers and John Turnbull, "Line and Staff in Industrial Relations," *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (July-August 1956), pp. 113-121.

¹²One caveat is important at this juncture. While this article places emphasis on ceremonial dimensions of the personnel role, the reader should not forget substantive aspects of that role. Similarly, our purpose is not to suggest that organizational life is composed solely or even mainly of ceremony and ritual. We intend merely to highlight determinants and consequences of ceremonials in organizations, specifically those associated with activities of personnel administrators.

two hundred twenty officials defined by personnel administrators as significant. The collection of research data and the generation, modification, and clarification of ideas presented in this study occurred during the period from 1966 to 1969.¹³ Thus it should be noted that the identification of relevant ceremonial activities, as well as the exploration of their supposed and actual effects,¹⁴ is predicated on the observations of personnel administrators, other management officials, and the authors.

Legitimation Process

As has been stated, ceremonials are utilized to affect the perceptions and expectations of individuals prior to their initial participation in organizational activities, throughout the various stages of their membership in the system, and prior to their departure. Organizationally relevant modifications in attitudes and

¹³This information was gathered in a series of structured interviews with and observations of personnel administrators and relevant role definers. The average length of an interview/observation series extended over 12 hours, with many exceeding 40 hours.

The data were gathered as part of a national study of personnel managers (who are members of the American Society of Personnel Administrators) and from an intensive study of personnel administrators located on the Niagara Frontier in western New York.

The first study was sponsored in part by the Society and by the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University; the second was sponsored in part by the Department of Organization, School of Management, State University of New York at Buffalo.

¹⁴It should be apparent that such assumptions may be completely correct, partially fulfilled, or completely invalid (i.e., entirely mythical). Not surprisingly, it was discovered that most traditionally accepted assumptions were partially correct or justified on the basis of the "actual" consequences of ceremonial activities. In such instances, however, the anticipated outcomes, while present and easily identified, were often of secondary importance when compared with other unanticipated consequences.

expectations often occur as a result of the officiation of personnel administrators at times of difficult role changes. Such participation clearly constitutes a set of ceremonial activities directed toward securing legitimacy for the proposed change. In this context, legitimation is defined in the Gross, Mason, and McEachern sense of the proclamation of the institutional legality of the change, which justifies its acceptance by both the role performer and his significant others.¹⁵ The office of personnel administrator can legitimate system changes because it tends to be the single organizational repository of systematically derived "scientific" information concerning members and their motivations. As a consequence, the acceptance and support by personnel administrators lends an air of scientific validity to changes in status or position. Organizational members appear to reason, "If the specialist approves an action, the approval is justified on scientific grounds; and if a change is scientifically correct, it should be accepted by all concerned." This perceived stamp of scientific validity and legitimacy conferred by personnel administrators tends to facilitate the resolution of system member uncertainties about the suitability of individuals in instances of promotion as well as about lack of justice in cases of termination.

Furthermore, the visible participation of personnel administrators provides legitimacy by symbolizing a corporate-wide approval of organizational changes. Any given line official, such as a plant manager, usually can speak only for a particular functional organizational group, since the authority inherent in his position is limited to that group. Person-

¹⁵N. Gross, W. Mason, and A. McEachern, *Explorations in Role Analysis* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1958).

nel administrators, however, represent authority which appears to cross functional and organizational lines. Thus, not only is an individual's status change approved by line officials in a given department, but also through participation of the personnel administrator this change is stamped "approved" by the broader corporate organization. In this manner also, the participation in change activities by personnel administrators serves to structure the perceptions or expectations of organizational members and, simultaneously, to resolve associated tensions concerning the appropriateness of particular changes.

Personnel administrators appear to symbolize not only broad corporate interests but also more general, societal concerns for social and individual justice. As the officially designated and informally recognized "keeper of the corporate conscience" concerning the fair and just treatment of human beings in the organization, the presence of a personnel administrator at times of status and role change apparently serves to indicate the change is just and fair for all concerned, especially for those who may *not* have been chosen. It is through the ceremonial intervention of this designated official that the perceptions and expectations of both the individual involved and related role partners are modified, while tensions associated with doubts about the wisdom of a change are resolved.

In some respects the legitimating function performed by personnel administrators closely parallels that of priests who officiate at the various stages of a person's life and death. Both the priest and the personnel administrator are assumed to represent a source of authority greater than that of the individuals involved. This authority is used, additionally, to sanction various occurrences which, with-

out legitimation, are cause for great concern.

Interestingly, however, such ceremonials result in the legitimation of *both* individuals experiencing change (as discussed above) and participating personnel administrators. In the manner of a self-fulfilling prophesy, the physical presence of personnel administrators during critical periods (hiring, evaluation, training, promotion, dismissal) suggests to organizational members that personnel administrators are essential to these activities. Thus, while it is true that the participation of personnel managers in hiring or promotion ceremonials facilitates the legitimation of associated changes, these ceremonial activities also result in the legitimation of personnel administrators themselves.

It should be noted that this legitimation by association has beneficial outcomes for personnel administrators. Regardless of intention, increased participation by personnel officials in ceremonial activities may result in greater resource allocations to personnel functions than would occur otherwise. Furthermore, the power of personnel administrators may be increased by the type of symbolic rewards which organizational members often presume to be within the legitimate control of such officials: promotions, transfers, job evaluations, pay schedules, training opportunities, etc. The assumption that they control such highly valued and visible rewards may increase the ability of personnel officials to influence the behavior of others.

Ceremonials of Relevance for Individual Role Performers

Selection and placement activities provide excellent examples of legitimation practices with the main goal of structuring the expectations of individuals. Most

selection and placement procedures involve elaborate testing and interviewing. Despite the fact that when judged solely on the basis of empirical evidence most of these procedures prove not to be particularly accurate in identifying the right person for the right job, they persist and proliferate.¹⁶ The continuous employment of these procedures may depend on their symbolic value as ceremonials rather than any demonstrable utility as selection devices.

Elaborate selection procedures (aptitude tests, psychological tests, stress interviews, etc.) confront the applicant with a series of difficult and ambiguous situations which he assumes have a direct relationship to success in the job to which he aspires. In addition, the applicant knows these tests will be scored and his score compared with others. This provides the applicant with further incentive to perform well on the trials. Test difficulty, combined with heightened motivation to succeed, increases the value of the reward for performing well, i.e., acceptance into the organization; after all, "that which is difficult is more rewarding than that which is obtained easily." In essence, individuals appear to believe that if entry into an organization is a result of success in a series of difficult trials, then membership in that system must be valuable. Sophisticated selection procedures, then, increase the value of organizational membership, not only for the new initiate but also for

the currently employed organizational member. For him the entry procedures provide evidence of the selectivity exercised by the organization: a process through which only those of greatest ability and value, himself included, are accepted.

In short, although selection procedures may not possess power to consistently select the "right" man for a job, they may facilitate the continuous and crucial organizational task of socializing both new and old system members. As a result of their apparent scientific rigor and of the legitimacy they effect, selection procedures (1) increase the commitment of a new initiate to the organization and thereby render him more susceptible to influence from the organization; (2) reinforce the perceptions and commitments of current members by reaffirming the value of system membership; (3) resolve questions for other system members concerning the competence and dependability of the individual; and (4) may establish a self-fulfilling prophecy by structuring the expectations of system colleagues in such a manner that those who perform exceptionally well during the trials tend to be organizationally successful since others *expect* them to succeed. Therefore, as the chief managers, interpreters, and general manipulators of selection and placement procedures, personnel administrators perform a vital ceremonial function.

Rites of Passage

Organizational ceremonies concerned primarily with legitimation include a subset of activities which may be called "rites of passage."¹⁷ These are employed

¹⁶H. G. Heneman, Jr., *Manpower Management: New Wrapping on Old Merchandise*, (Minneapolis, Minn.: Industrial Relations Center, University of Minnesota, 1960); G. W. England and D. G. Peterson, "Selection and Placement—The Past Ten Years," in H. G. Heneman, ed., *Employment Relations Research*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), pp. 43–72; and M. D. Dunwitte, "Personnel Management," *Seminal Review of Psychology*, Vol. 13, 1962, pp. 285–314.

¹⁷Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). This book was translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee.

in the socialization of individual actors and their role partners in new organizational positions. In effect, these ceremonial activities are designed to speed the acquisition of particular skills and expectations required to effectively consummate role changes.

In general, rites of passage have three distinct stages. First, the member in transition is removed from interaction with those performing organizational roles he will abandon. Along with others in transition between roles, the individual progresses, during a second stage, through a series of activities which bring him into close and frequent contact with persons occupying positions related to, and perhaps identical with, those he will enter. These interactions provide information about the technical and emotional demands to which he is expected to respond in his new position. In the final phase, ceremonial activities conclude with the introduction of the "changed" person into a new system of associations and expectations. Although little of a concrete, tangible nature actually may change, the individual progresses through a series of experiences which facilitate the acquisition of appropriate new role behaviors. Regardless of whether or not the initiate has been exposed to training procedure which actually produced new skills or knowledge, the rite of passage forces him into a pattern of behavior relevant to his new role.¹⁸

Many managerial and supervisory training programs actually constitute effective rites of passage. For example, in one company included in our interview sample, all candidates for supervisory

positions were given a two-day battery of screening tests, including supervisory aptitude scales and intelligence measures. As the first step in the rite, those who "passed" (and there were many who did not) were removed from their current jobs and placed in isolated training units where line supervisors instructed them in technical procedures and problems of supervision. At this point, once again, some did not "pass." At the third (or reincorporation) phase, occurring at the conclusion of training, the company put on an induction ceremony which included a speech by the production superintendent outlining the program the new initiates had been through and a cocktail party with the new supervisors as guests of honor. When the newly appointed foreman actually assumed his role, a brief shutdown of work occurred, and those employees he was to supervise heard about his "ordeal." Interestingly, objective measurements undertaken by a system outsider indicate that neither the testing nor the training achieved any of their explicit goals. There appeared to be considerable belief on the part of many organizational members, however, that supervisors chosen and trained through these procedures performed their jobs well and acted like members of management. As a result, the procedures and practices have persisted.

The above provides examples of the various levels at which the impacts of ceremonials may be assessed. For the individual, the testing and training procedures serve to structure his expectations and perceptions of, and commitments to a new organizational role. The "trainee" experiences obvious organizational approval of his altered status and also gains some insight into the demands and expectations of others relevant to his new position. For other organizational

¹⁸For a discussion of the dynamics underlying the acquisition of roles see J. Alutto, "Role Theory In Propositional Form" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University, 1968), pp. 61-81.

members, the training procedures serve to reduce their anxieties concerning the desirability of the proposed change and, by transmitting cues to the effect that the new member is competent, also serve to establish the requisite conditions for meaningful role relationships. While it may be "objectively" true that overall initial selection decisions could have been generated as effectively by random identifications of trainees, organizational members believed the decisional criteria were appropriate and useful. Thus, the impact of training ceremonials rests with the belief in and acceptance by system members and not with empirical determinations of effectiveness.

Stability or Equilibrium Functions

An additional function of ceremonials is their contribution to the maintenance or achievement of organizational stability following technological or structural change. For instance, management training programs often generate clarification of new role expectations for both individual role performers and other related system members, while also facilitating the emergence of new informal groupings through which the expectations may be fulfilled. By providing an opportunity to bring difficult problems "out in the open" where they can be discussed in a nonthreatening manner, training facilitates the formation of new cliques and compatibility groups. Particularly for individuals considered marginal either before or after an organizational change, training may provide the only opportunity to reestablish realistic communication and affiliation networks and may constitute a mechanism for readmission into the mainstream of organizational life. In this sense, managerial training may result in the crystallization of new self-images for those experiencing change.

In a therapeutic sense, training also appears to fulfill the emotional needs of those involved in change. A pleasant feeling of well-being tends to be generated by participation in training sessions. Out of this euphoria may come a smoother functioning organization, one in which the sharing of anxiety produces emotionally satisfying results.

Similarly, as a result of providing the trainee with an opportunity to share his problems with others, training ceremonials usually foster discovery by the trainee that he is not the only individual experiencing uncertainty about the "right thing to do." In this manner many trainees come to understand that their own feelings of isolation and frustration are not only shared by others but also are caused by common experiences. This therapeutic value is perhaps best illustrated by requests for the formation of a kind of "supervisors anonymous" where former trainees can meet periodically and discuss mutual problems.

Equally as important, training also indicates the organization cares about the problems of its people. By asking persons to attend a training program and involving them in its ceremonials (sending formal memoranda to them, placing telephone calls to their place of work, and presenting graduation certificates), the organization indicates it does know they exist. This feeling of inclusion increases the sense of identification of each trainee with the organization. Attendance at training sessions, formal memos, telephone calls, and certificates are all visible symbols of the trainee's importance. At the same time, such extensive formal recognition helps to convince trainees that they are and will be performing tasks of significance. Thus, training has a therapeutic commitment-

producing effect in addition to that of maintaining consensus.

In short, whether or not training accomplishes its stated objectives, it clearly serves as a mechanism both for preventing the tensions surrounding change from disrupting an organization and for socializing neophyte role occupants to new expectations and clique patterns. Training also enables the organization, acting through the personnel administrator, to minister to the emotional needs of system members in somewhat the same manner as a religious organization serves the religious needs of believers through its clergy.

Not only do the traditional activities performed by personnel administrators legitimate many types of organizational changes, they also serve to remove or reduce anxieties concerning certain status quo conditions. As one examines facets of organizational life, it becomes obvious there are many anxieties which arise from "the way things are today." Many of these appear to surround the distribution of rewards and authority in organizations, and at least two activities normally assigned to personnel administrators directly effect the perpetuation of internal system structures serving to allocate rewards and authority.

Questions of the appropriateness of wage and other reward differentials are resolved through appeals to established job evaluation procedures. The utilization of such symbols to legitimate the status quo tends to be effective because wage and salary programs employ apparently rational, scientific techniques involving the determination and manipulation of quantitative rather than qualitative measures. Yet in our interviews, several personnel administrators defined job evaluation as "the systematic application of bias to the ranking of jobs,"

implying that while job evaluation may have the virtue of consistency, it is far from being scientific. Any practitioner can point, of course, to sources of error in these programs: jobs raised in order to meet competitive labor market conditions or jobs designed for a specific individual and then evaluated to give him sufficient salary potential. The main organizational value of job evaluation lies not in its ability to precisely weigh jobs, but rather in its "scientific sounding" approach to this problem. In turn, this in and of itself, is sufficient to justify (from the perspective of organizational members) existing salary structures, thereby reducing organizational anxieties surrounding the differential distribution of rewards.

For much the same reason, performance appraisal programs serve to buttress the current distribution of authority in organizations. Regardless of the procedures employed, implicit in the implementation of performance appraisal programs is a recognition by both the superior and subordinate of their role relationships. That is, the mere act of appraising performance reminds the superior that he is the superior (or else why evaluate performance?) and the subordinate that he is a subordinate (or else why participate in the evaluation?). In short, the mere act of participation in the process of performance appraisal reinforces and legitimates organizational authority structures.

Symbolic Embodiment of Organizational Values

In part, ceremonials affect perceptions and expectations by providing symbols which remind members of central organizational values. In much the same manner that the Senate of the United States employs a chaplain to symbolize its con-

cern for religion and the righteousness of each member, the personnel administrator symbolizes the corporate organization's concern for fair and equitable treatment of organizational members. Through a process of association similar to that previously discussed in terms of legitimation, the personnel administrator's existence imputes such a concern to each and every organizational member, particularly "members of management."

In reality, then, the personnel administrator provides a visible symbol (to both members of the organization and outsiders) of the ideal towards which the organization strives in dealing with employees: an ideal which, because it is an ideal, need never be attained. The mere provision of this symbol reminds system members of their responsibilities for the human aspects of their organizational roles. It may be that the basic function of the personnel administrator is not to *guarantee* the just treatment of individuals but rather to symbolize the organization's *intention* to strive toward equitable behavior.

The Insider-Outsider

As previously discussed, the personnel administrator serves to represent general societal values of fairness and justice to the organization and its members. This means that the personnel administrator functions as an insider-outsider: he performs a role inside the organization which advocates the position of those interests outside the organization. This inevitably marks the personnel role as different from other organizational roles concerned primarily with internal matters. Such a peculiar function may generate doubts about the organizational loyalty of personnel role performers. This uncertainty contributes to feelings

of organizational marginality and poses one of the most serious dilemmas confronting personnel practitioners. On the one hand, the successful conduct of the role is dependent on the administrator's relationship with other organizational roles. Yet the very nature of this insider-outsider function (i.e., as an advocate of outside organizational values) cuts personnel administrators off from meaningful relationships with the role performers over whom they must exert influence. This marginality and conflict often causes personnel administrators to physically and psychologically withdraw by becoming extensively and actively involved in external organizational activities such as community work, activities of chambers of commerce, and professional groups.

This insider-outsider role has another dimension. As a representative of extraorganizational concerns, by definition the personnel administrator becomes a nonparticipant in organizational struggles between employees and superiors. As a nonparticipant (or at least a relative neutral), he is in a position to receive "secret information" from both sides. A parallel might be drawn between the priest, who is in a position to receive information from parishioners concerning their sins, weaknesses, and transgressions, and the personnel administrator, who is in a position to receive information from organizational members about their machinations and organizational transgressions.

This access to secret knowledge brings, at one and the same time, considerable power and pain. For instance, such knowledge about organizational members can be potentially dangerous to them. The best defense against leakage of this threatening information is to structure the possessor's role so that he

has only minimal contact with other persons in the organization who might capitalize on such information¹⁹ as well as attempt to discredit the possessor. Such actions by system members tend to further exacerbate the marginality of personnel administrators.

Nevertheless, because of possession of secret information, personnel administrators are often in a position to accrue considerable potential power over certain individuals within their organizations. The possession of secret knowledge enables the administrator to exchange silence on certain issues for benefits such as status, deference, inclusion, etc. Thus, the phenomenon is often seen of public inclusion of the personnel administrator in high councils but a private discounting of the views of this role occupant as other organizational officials balance the need to prevent the personnel administrator from using the knowledge he possesses with their desires to retain control of the enterprise.

Summary

Ceremonials are an important aspect of organizational life. The analysis of ceremonials may be particularly relevant to the attainment of organizational goals which concern the building and maintenance of the organization over time. In respect to personnel administra-

tors, relevant ceremonials serve to facilitate the resolution of problems associated with organizational selection, role transition, organizational and technological change, and the maintenance or legitimation of authority structures—all problems which must be managed if the organization is to survive.

The analysis of ceremonial activities has three interesting implications. First, by providing relatively satisfying, apparently simple solutions to complex and perplexing problems, ceremonials tend to perpetuate themselves. As with the creation of communities, they tend to “outlive their usefulness.” Second, ceremonials probably render organizational life, with all of its buzzing impersonality, more tolerable. This may be a major functional value of ceremonials in organizations. Finally, as a result of continual assumptions concerning the effectiveness of ceremonials in resolving organizational problems and the fact that ceremonials often outlast the substantive reasons which gave rise to them, ceremonials may generate unintended and unwarranted organizational resistance to change.

Researchers in general have avoided examining the ceremonial dimensions of organizations and the manner in which organizations utilize ceremonials. This area offers a rich field for further scientific research into understanding, explanation, and prediction of organizational behavior.

¹⁹For a discussion of the importance of controlling the visibility aspects of role behavior see *ibid.* chaps. III, V, and VI.